

## Message Text

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TAGS: SHUM, BM

SUBJECT: 1978 COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES

REF: (A) STATE 215801; (B) STATE 207310; (C) COUNTRY  
REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES, FEBRUARY 3, 1978  
(PP. 223-227)

1. WE PLAN TO PROPOSE ONLY MINOR CHANGES IN THE PREVIOUS  
HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT FOR BURMA (SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS EARLY  
THIS YEAR) WITH THE EXCEPTIONS NOTED BELOW.

2. UNDER SECTION 1.C. ARBITRARY ARREST OR IMPRISONMENT,  
BEFORE THE PENULTIMATE SENTENCE INSERT THE FOLLOWING: BEGIN  
QUOTE: THIS YEAR APPROXIMATELY 200 STUDENTS WERE RELEASED  
PRIOR TO COMPLETION OF THEIR SENTENCES. END QUOTE.

3. SECTION 3.A. FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, SPEECH, PRESS,  
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RELIGION AND ASSEMBLY HAS BEEN REWRITTEN AND EXPANDED AS  
FOLLOWS: BEGIN QUOTE:

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS LIMITED IN BURMA. WHILE PRIVATE  
STATEMENTS OF DISCONTENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT ARE ACCEPTABLE,  
PUBLIC DECLARATIONS IN OPPOSITION TO THE REGIME ARE NOT  
TOLERATED. PUBLIC MEDIA ARE GOVERNMENT-OWNED AND

CONTROLLED, AND THE LIMITED FOREIGN PUBLICATIONS PERMITTED TO BE IMPORTED ARE OCCASIONALLY CENSORED. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS ARE WIDELY AND FREELY AVAILABLE.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY IS RESTRICTED. INDEPENDENT, SECULAR MASS ORGANIZATIONS (INCLUDING LABOR UNIONS) ARE BANNED. INSTEAD A NETWORK OF PARTY-SPONSORED WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' ORGANIZATIONS, YOUTH LEAGUES, AND SIMILAR GROUPS HAVE BEEN FORMED. THE WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS, LIKE THE OTHER MASS ORGANIZATIONS, PROVIDE SOME OPPORTUNITY FOR EXPRESSION OF THE VIEWS OF ORDINARY CITIZENS, BUT LARGELY SERVE AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATING NATIONAL POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTING GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION IS A BASIC TENET OF THE 1974 CONSTITUTION AND IS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE WIDELY OBSERVED. THE PEOPLE OF BURMA REPRESENT A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS. THE KACHINS AND KARENS, FOR EXAMPLE, SPEAK LANGUAGES OF THEIR OWN AND ARE LARGELY CHRISTIAN. THE SHANS SPEAK A FORM OF THAI AND SHARE BUDDHISM WITH THE MAJORITY BURMANS. THESE DIFFERENCES HAVE RESULTED IN CONSIDERABLE COMMUNAL AND RELIGIOUS TENSION THROUGH BURMESE HISTORY. TODAY THIS PROBLEM IS EXACERBATED BY THE FACT THAT ALL THREE OF THESE MAJOR NON-BURMAN ETHNIC GROUPS SUPPORT INSURRECTIONS AGAINST THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MENT. IN AREAS CONTROLLED BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, MINORITY REPRESENTATIVES OCCUPY IMPORTANT GOVERNMENTAL POSITIONS. THE MINORITIES ARE ALSO WELL REPRESENTED IN CENTRAL ORGANS, INCLUDING THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE BSPP AND THE COUNCIL OF STATE.

TENSIONS HAVE ALSO PERIODICALLY INCREASED BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND BUDDHISTS IN WESTERN BURMA. DURING THE SPRING OF 1978 OVER 150,000 SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIMS CROSSED THE BORDER INTO BANGLADESH FROM BURMA'S ARAKAN STATE, CREATING A SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR BANGLADESH AND REQUIRING SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF OUTSIDE RELIEF. THE MUSLIMS ALLEGED PERSECUTION BY BURMESE AUTHORITIES, WHICH THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT HAS DENIED. IN JULY AN AGREEMENT WAS REACHED BETWEEN BURMA AND BANGLADESH FOR RETURN OF THOSE MUSLIMS WITH SOME EVIDENCE OF LEGAL RESIDENCE IN BURMA OR BURMESE CITIZENSHIP. THE REPATRIATION COMMENCED ON SCHEDULE ON AUGUST 31.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN BURMA IS AMONG THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD. THEY SHARE EQUALLY IN EDUCATION, ENTER THE PROFESSIONS, CONTROL FAMILY FINANCES, DOMINATE RETAIL TRADE, AND OWN A GREAT DEAL OF REAL ESTATE. BURMESE WOMEN

GENERALLY HAVE EQUAL STATUS UNDER LAW AND INHERIT EQUALLY

WITH MALES. END QUOTE.

4. EMBASSY COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS REQUESTED ASAP. CHRISTOPHER

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## Message Attributes

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